

The Fox family: Mom, Dad, 10-year-old Terry on the left, Fred (11) on the right and Judith (3) and Darrell (6) in front



Terry Fox

The Cancer Fighter

Terrance Stanley Fox. That was the name Betty and Rolly gave to the son born on July 28, 1958, in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Terry spent the next eight years growing up there, with his older brother Fred, younger brother Darrell and baby sister Judith. Their home was a busy place. Rolly was a Canadian National Railway switchman, and Betty was a homemaker, but always the children came first.

Terry, like Fred, attended Wayoata Elementary. School was important, but so was outdoor play in the large field behind their home. Winters were fun, too. Once, the snow drifted so high against the house that the boys could toboggan down it.





Terry, age 9, with a baseball trophy, and in 1971, third from right, with his peewee soccer team

Terry's determined and competitive nature showed early. At a family picnic softball game, his nose suddenly began to bleed so badly that he was taken to hospital. Back at the picnic, he immediately rejoined the game. No mere nosebleed would stop Terry Fox.

The Foxes moved to Port Coquitlam, British Columbia, in 1966, where Terry attended Glen Elementary and then Mary Hill Junior Secondary School. He wasn't a natural student, but he studied hard and did well. Terry met a new friend, Doug Alward, during grade eight Phys Ed. They played rugby, baseball and soccer together. They also competed against each other in cross-country races.

Terry's true goal was to play basketball, but his skills definitely needed improving, so he practised before and after school. Terry and Doug played one-on-one, or "21." By grade ten they were on the Ravens, Port Coquitlam Senior Secondary School's basketball team. "His favourite shot was a spin-a-rama," Doug recalls. "He was a defensive specialist." They shared the Athlete of the Year Award when they graduated.

Terry Fox enrolled at Simon Fraser University in 1976, studying kinesiology, the science of how the body moves. That November he banged his right knee in a car accident. The pain slowly increased until, by spring, it was unbearable. His father drove him to the Royal Columbian Hospital in New Westminster. X-rays were taken. Blood tests and a bone scan were performed. Terry's family gathered supportively around him as the doctor gave them the results. Terry had osteogenic sarcoma, a type of bone cancer. His leg would have to be amputated as soon as possible.

Terry took the news very hard at first but then found the courage to face what was coming. He would lose a leg, but he would never lose his resolve. Six days later Terry's leg was amputated.

The night before the surgery, he read a magazine article about Dick Traum, a one-legged runner who had completed the New York City Marathon. It planted an idea in Terry's mind. He too would run again someday, and when he did, he would run across Canada – to raise money for cancer research.

Within a month he was home and walking with crutches and a temporary prosthesis. He had left the hospital behind, but not the memories of the suffering he had seen there. More determined than ever, he began to train for the greatest challenge of his life. "Nobody is ever going to call me a quitter," he said.

At the invitation of wheelchair athlete Rick Hansen, Terry started to play wheelchair basketball



that summer. "For the entire time he was on the floor," Hansen recalls, "he gave everything he could." Terry and his team, the Vancouver Cablecars, won the Canadian championship the next year. He began running, and asked Doug for advice. "Start with one lap," Doug told him. That one lap grew and grew. On the Labour Day weekend in 1979, he entered the 17-mile Prince George to Boston Marathon. Three hours and nine minutes later, he finished in last place. He'd never had a greater personal triumph.

Terry was ready. In his day-after-day training, he had run more than 5000 kilometres. The letters he wrote asking



Training every day, Terry gradually builds strength and endurance

for support were answered. Adidas gave him running shoes, and the Ford Motor Company donated the van Doug would drive. Other companies and organizations were providing money, supplies and support. It was time to run across Canada.



Terry Fox waves to the crowd as he runs through Toronto on his Marathon of Hope.

Terry Fox's Marathon of Hope began at St. John's, Newfoundland, on April 12, 1980. With CBC filming, he dipped his artificial leg into the Atlantic Ocean. He began to run.

Canadians watched his now familiar step-step-stride as he pushed on across Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, where his brother Darrell joined him. "His smile is what I remember most that day," Darrell recalls.

The country responded. In Montreal, Quebec, businessman Isadore Sharp organized a fundraiser.

Children gave change, people cheered, and Canada pitched in as Terry Fox ran through Ontario. Terry began to think big – one dollar from every Canadian for cancer research. "If you've given a dollar," he said in one of his many speeches, "you are part of the Marathon of Hope."

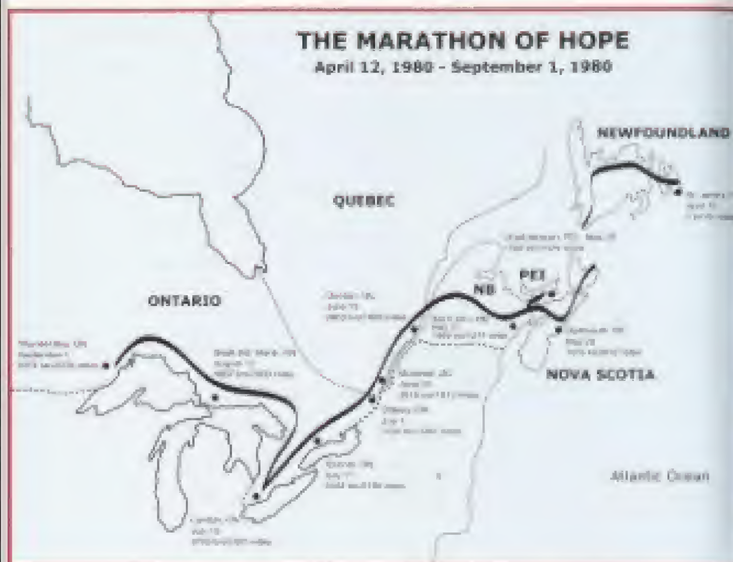


A shoe worn by Terry Fox during his run across Canada

Terry Fox touched the lives of many young people. In northern Ontario, he spent time with Greg Scott, a ten-year-old boy who also had lost a leg to cancer.



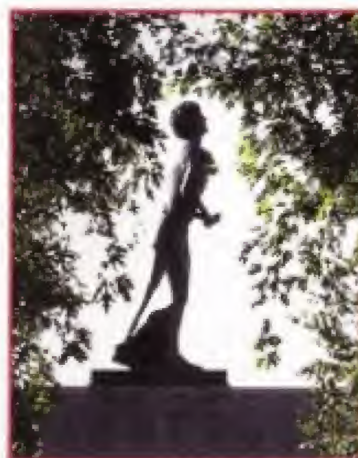
Then, just outside Thunder Bay, Terry began coughing. His chest hurt so much that he asked Doug to drive him to a hospital. The tests told Terry what he had suspected, that cancer was now in his lungs. Rolly and Betty Fox flew to Ontario to bring their son home for more



treatment. He had run 5374 kilometres in those 143 days, and he was determined to finish. "I promise I won't give up," he told Canadians that afternoon at a press conference. "I hope that what I've done has been an inspiration."

It was. The next day Isadore Sharp telegrammed, promising to organize a run held each year in Terry Fox's name. On September 7 Terry watched a CTV fundraising broadcast as he underwent more chemotherapy in hospital. Ten and a half million dollars was raised, but it didn't stop there. Thousands of people wrote or telegrammed, as dances, recitals, run-a-thons and walk-a-thons were held. By February 1981 more than twenty-four million dollars had been raised. His courage was inspiring the world.

For months Terry Fox fought the hardest battle of his life, and he was even able to return home for a while. He never gave up his dream of finishing the Marathon of Hope. But on June 28, 1981, with his family around him, Terry Fox died. Flags on all Canadian federal buildings were lowered to half staff. He was laid to rest at Port Coquitlam cemetery,



This monument near Thunder Bay marks the end of Terry Fox's cross-country run.



Terry Fox runs along the Trans-Canada Highway in northern Ontario, escorted by police.

while his loved ones and all of Canada mourned.

Terry Fox was honoured during his brief life. He was the youngest Canadian to be named a Companion of the Order of Canada. He was awarded B.C.'s highest civilian award, the Order of the Dogwood. Since his death, parks, monuments, schools, a B.C. mountain, and an icebreaker have been named after him. In 1999, in a national survey, he was voted Canada's greatest hero.

And every September since his death, The Terry Fox Run has taken place all over the world. The Terry Fox Foundation has given hundreds of millions of dollars toward cancer research. Terry Fox once wrote, "Somewhere the hurting must stop." Until that day comes, this heroic Canadian's Marathon of Hope will continue.

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Maxine Trottier is a former elementary school teacher with a passion for history. She has written many children's books on the Canadian experience.

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